
Title: Against the Orcs Pt III

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Part III: The Challenge

I was buying a few fish
steaks wrapped in oiled
cloth from one of the
seedy tillermen that sat
up shop on the Cove
docks when my
communications crystal
began to hum in the
pouch on my belt.

"Aye, I han't heard one
o' them in the years
since the days of Dayel
Stormcrow." The old man
said. He was hunched over
a gutted fish swarming
with flies.

I unwrapped my
food and opened a corked
bottle of the local swill
that passed for ale. It
was overly foamy, tasted
of sourdough bread, and
had all the subtle hints
of an orc axe. I had set
everything down on a bit
of oiled cloth and I
finally took out the
crystal.

"Garrett! Thank
the virtues you
answered!" Gonick's voice
echoed through the ether.

"I'm at the gate to
town being threatened by
a vicious man with red
hair and some sort of
pole axe."

"Ge-heh-heh!" The old
man cackled a bit. I
thought he was going to
choke on phlegm. "You
three are gonna go

into the Cove orc fort,
eh?"

"Yes." I said, bundling
everything back into the
oil cloth. I took a big
swig of beer, emptying
the bottle, save for the
cloudy mess that had
settled at the bottom,
and threw the bottle into
the sea.

I recognized the old man.
When the orcs had
attacked the bar, he was
the one who'd hidden
behind a table while the
scurvy louts all trampled
one another in terror.

"Well you'll need a
tiller-man! And a fast
boat!" He crawled.
"She's fast enough for
you, old man." I
sneered. "Look, unless
you're also ready for a
hell of a fight, I'll find
someone with more of a
pulse to pilot the ship.
Wouldn't want the man
at the rudder to die of
a heart attack."

I headed for the gate,
where Syleo had stopped
Gonick, who was patiently
explaining who he was, the
purpose of his visit, and
who he was coming to
visit.

It was the last bit that
seemed a sore sticking
part for Syleo.

"Granth, eh? Told me
some bits about him being
involved in the war of
Light and Dark, about
how necromancers and
orcs didn't kill him when
they should have.
Doesn't seem to fit the
picture of the man."
"Garrett is a quester
of knowledge and lore

above all. He would be loath to turn a place like Cove over to the orcs. Orcs burn books, sir.” Gonick said. Syleo considered the point. I considered the last time I had seen orcs up close.

YEARS AGO:

“But he hummie. Pink and weak. We smash!” The orc guard conferred to his compatriot.

“No. Boss man tell us to look out for this one!” The other orc growled. This orc was some sort of shaman, not one of the tribal elders I had come to speak with, but a powerful mage nonetheless. My feeble magical skills were no match for the spell of paralysis he had used to hold me.

“But how you know it him?” The hatchet-and-shield wielding orc asked.

“Funny hat with funny feather. Shinies armor. Silly axe on stick.” He said, referencing my custom-crafted exceptional feather hat, my platemail armor, and my halberd. While countless hours of the art of the forge had gone into the crafting of these war clothes, the vicious and primitive weapons of the orcs seemed, at the moment, far more dangerous.

“Gah!” The junior orc wailed. “Just smashes and be done with!”

“We wait like chief say!” The other orc said. “Vas flam!” He spat the orcish version

of the words of power,
and the small fireball lept
up and burned the other
orc. The smell was
awful, and the peon spent
a few seconds rolling on
the ground while the
shaman laughed.

“You laugh too, hummie!
Or maybe we clump you
even though chief say
no!” He demanded,
pointing a wand at me.
The wand was made of
bone, clutching a chicken
skull.

More nervous than usual,
I laughed, even though the
paralysis crushed at my
cheek bones when I tried.
“Good! He laugh!
Maybe pink fleshy hummie
not so bad.” The
shaman said. “But too
shiny! Too clean!”

“First time I've ever
heard THAT.” I managed
to grit out.

“SILENCE!” A booming
voice echoed. “Bring
him before me!”

Atop the crudely carved
wooden tower stood a
huge orc in a smoldering
mask, wrapped in a
wraith-like cloak. He held
a crooked staff to the
afternoon sky and then
pointed it at me. His
English was smooth,
learned, and that terrified
me. But this was the
orc I was looking for.

“Why do you come here,
human? To hunt and kill
our kind and be called a
hero in your own lands?”

I swallowed hard. “No.
I come here to learn,
elder shaman. I come
here to preserve the

history of your tribes
and people.”“Orcs
preserve the history!
Orcs know the people!”
He shouted. The other
orcs around me shrank
back, formed a gauntlet
between me and the
tower.

“And yours is a life of
war, shaman!” I said.
“And all things die.
What happens, then, when
your tribe is no more?
What happens, then?”“If
our tribe is no more,
then our history is not
worth saving for those
who come after us.”
The shaman said.

“Many who fall are yet
strong.” I countered.
“You learn from the
skulls and bones of the
fallen. If you are dust,
and fires consume that
which you have written,
then those who come
after us will know
nothing. They will be
forced to start over.
They will have to relearn
the strength and honor
and violence you know
now.”

"They must earn it
through BLOOD!" The
shaman shouted. He
intoned a guttural orcish
spell designed to poison
me, but I stood strong.
“There is strength that
can be learned.” I said,
red in the face,
attempting not to gasp
for air. “But you are
greater than those who
came before you, and
that is why you tread on
their bones. And those
who come after you will
be greater still, should
you preserve their lore.
And if this lore comes
into human lands, and

human hands, your enemies
will be stronger still.
They will force you to be
stronger, orc. That is
your way. Strength, and
the power it gives, are
the paths to more
power.”

“What do you think you
know of the ways of
orcs?” He said, slowly.

“Very little. But grant
me the right, and I will
know much. Humans will
know much. New foes
will exploit weaknesses
you did not know you had,
and new allies will arise,
that you never knew
existed. That is the way
of knowledge. It must be
free to roam to the
ends of Sosaria, shaman.”

“So be it.” He said.

“But nothing in this
world is free, human.
You must face the
daemon. Toe to toe. No
magic. No crossbows.
Steel yourself, weakling.”
I drew my sword and my
shield. I was ready to
learn.

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